

LIKE many who buy a Lottery ticket, Martyn Tott never seriously contemplated the possibility that he would actually win. Of course, it would have been wonderful, but he was largely happy with his rather humdrum life. When he realised he'd scooped the £3,011,065 jackpot, however, his opinion changed somewhat.

Suddenly, a social life that revolved around Chinese takeaways, pints of ale and Saturday nights spent rock 'n' roll dancing at the local town hall seemed positively mundane. So, too, did his two-bedroom maisonette in Watford and his job as a purchasing manager.

Martyn planned to ditch his old life for a round-the-world trip, an Audi TT car and a luxury home to live in with his wife, Kay.

There was just one problem. Martyn and Kay had bought their winning ticket six months before they saw an appeal for the winner to come forward — and had since lost it. Lottery organiser Camelot refused to pay them their winnings, even though the couple had been able to prove with computer records that they were telling the truth.

This happened back in 2001, when the decision sparked a national furore. It became as much a

by Antonia Hoyle

debate about corporate greed as the simple matter of a lost Lottery ticket.

Everyone from Sir Richard Branson to Tony Blair championed the Totts' cause. But Camelot claimed they could not change the rules to suit popular opinion, or, indeed, government intervention. Discussion, it seemed, was over.

Yet Martyn became obsessed with the millions he believed to be rightfully his. His fixation cost him his marriage and his sanity. It prompted him to launch three legal battles, and — as much to Martyn's surprise as anyone else's — fall under the spell of an evangelical organisation he now believes is little better than a cult.

It is only now, ten years on, that he has found happiness again. And in the week that one lucky British ticket-holder won £101 million on the EuroMillions, his story of delight, despair and self-destruction is a fascinating lesson for all those who've ever wished that 'it could have been them'.

'Having that money taken away was torture.'

says Martyn. 'For a long time I lost sight of who I was and what I believed in. But I can honestly say I'm glad I didn't get the £3 million now.'

'There is no guarantee it would have brought me happiness. A win like that is a huge responsibility, and there is no instruction manual to tell you how to deal with it. I could have been foolish. I might have fallen off my yacht or grown paranoid that people only wanted me for my millions.'

Sitting in the same cramped living room he was once so desperate to escape, Martyn, 44, doesn't strike you as one of life's success stories.

He is still working as a purchasing manager, still paying off his mortgage and his holiday budget runs to Cornwall rather than the Caribbean. It is hard to see how his life wouldn't have been improved by £3 million.

But he seems happy, fulfilled and far better off than some Lottery winners, most notably Michael Carroll, who squandered his £9.7 million on drugs, prostitutes and a gambling addiction, before declaring himself broke.

'I've realised there was nothing wrong with the life I had in the first place,' says Martyn. 'I've got things in perspective. Money isn't anywhere near as important as we're led to believe.'

'My favourite thing is sitting on a Cornish beach, staring out to sea, eating fish and chips and drinking tea out of a paper cup. Simple pleasures like that make life special.'

It was March 5, 2001, when Martyn and Kay, a receptionist, saw a local news bulletin in which the presenter announced that someone in their area held an unclaimed Lottery ticket.

The jackpot winner had only four hours to claim their prize before the 180-day limit Camelot imposed on claims expired.

Neither could believe it when they realised the six winning numbers were theirs — they used the same combination every week — but they had lost the ticket that proved it.

Like many Lottery players, the couple, who had met at a dance class and married in 2000, had been keen enough to buy a ticket twice a week but sensible enough to know their chances of winning the jackpot were negligible — or 14 million to one, as Martyn would later find out.

Realism had led to carelessness, and they had forgotten to check their numbers for one crucial Wednesday night draw the previous September.

Furious with himself, Martyn called Camelot and the next morning the company's security chief, Martin Challis, visited. 'We explained we'd been using the same numbers for a year; six for my birthday, seven for Kay's birthday, 11 for the day we got engaged, 23 and 32 for the ages we were when we met and 44 for my grandma's house number.'

Computer records proved that Kay had bought the ticket at her local

'I can honestly say I'm glad I didn't win the money'

Londis corner shop, just as she had said, and Challis told the Totts he was '101 per cent' sure that they were the rightful ticket holders.

What the Totts didn't know was that there's a little-known rule in place which decrees that lost tickets must be reported within 30 days. However, Challis said Camelot could well make an exception.

'He told us not to tell anyone because we would be besieged by the Press,' says Martyn.

The couple — who survived on a joint income of £34,000 a year — started to celebrate. 'It was impossible not to wonder what our new life would be like,' says Martyn.

Yet days turned into weeks as Camelot dithered. Their indecision put inevitable strain on the Totts. Martyn stopped sleeping and — having only ever been a social drinker — started drinking whisky at home alone to numb the feelings of despair and frustration. Kay lost a stone in weight. Both found the pressure of keeping their secret almost unbearable.

'It felt as though we were living a lie, and the wait was agonising,' says Martyn. 'We combed every inch of the house but we still couldn't find the ticket. We knew blaming each other wouldn't help, but the stress made us snappy and irritable.'

It was 45 days later before Camelot finally told the Totts that they were not prepared to pay up. 'We were furious,' he says. 'Why couldn't they have told us in the first place?'

Martyn and Kay decided to reveal

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their identities in the media. They were portrayed as the unluckiest couple in Britain. Celebrities from Sir Terry Wogan to Ulrika Jonsson said they had been treated despicably.

Former Culture Secretary Chris Smith urged Camelot to 'see reason,' with the then Prime Minister Tony Blair backing his comments. Previous Lottery winners who had received payouts despite losing their tickets came forward in support.

The Totts' hired a lawyer on a no-win-no-fee basis and launched a claim against Camelot on the basis that their 30-day rule wasn't clear. Yet they were forced to concede that their argument wasn't strong enough to stand up in court.

Sir Richard Branson — who had launched an unsuccessful bid to take over the Lottery from Camelot the previous year — offered the couple a week on his privately owned Necker Island by way of compensation.

'We were flown first class and fed by a Michelin-starred chef,' says Martyn. 'But being given a glimpse of the lifestyle we had so nearly won only made it harder to accept that we hadn't.'

Even Tony Blair's wife, Cherie Booth

THE MAN WHO WON A £3 MILLION LOTTERY TICKET

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Picture: SOLENT NEWS

The unluckiest couple in Britain? Martyn Tott and his wife Kay before their marriage fell apart

group. He said I should come and live in Tennessee.' A suggestion that would perhaps have sounded alarm bells instantly to most of us was eagerly accepted by Martyn. 'Suddenly, I was given purpose and direction,' he says. 'With hindsight, it was a crazy thing to do, but I wasn't in my right mind.' After his holiday visa expired, he returned to Britain with the intention of putting his flat on the market and preparing for a new life in Nashville. But getting a permanent U.S. visa proved difficult. Torn between two lifestyles, his Lottery obsession continued. In 2004, Martyn made a plea on GMTV for someone to sponsor his legal battle in return for a third of the jackpot. Businessman Jonathan Bunn accepted the offer and, as he launched his third court case, Martyn was once again given a glimmer of hope. Unable to acquire a permanent visa for the U.S., he returned to Nashville the following year on another three-month permit, but there his hopes of a new life quickly vanished. 'The Apostle was furious I hadn't moved there permanently,' he says. 'I learned he was asking all members to pay him 10 per cent of their earnings. It struck me he was more interested in the money than me.' Martyn returned to Watford and found work as a purchasing manager. 'I'd lost my faith in God, and I was too obsessed with the Lottery to focus on finding a new relationship,' he says. 'The only thing that kept me going was the hope I might get the money.' Martyn's lawyers issued a writ against Camelot, which went to London's High Court in March 2007. But Martyn was warned that if he lost the hearing, he would be responsible for the Lottery firm's predicted £400,000 legal fees. Jonathan Bunn told Martyn — who by now had spent £3,000 of his own savings on legal fees — that it

'I lost touch with who I was and what I believed'

was too much of a risk and backed out of the sponsorship. 'After years of hoping and obsessing, I realised I was never going to get the money,' he says. 'It was a horrible feeling, but I knew I couldn't carry on being angry. I had my health, and a family who loved me. In many respects, I was fortunate.' It proved to be the turning point he needed to get his life back on track. 'I had to take control and turn the whole ordeal into something positive,' he says. 'I decided to use my experiences to write a fictional account of what had happened.' Two years ago, he found happiness with his new girlfriend, a 26-year-old university graduate he met at a comedy club. 'When I told her about my Lottery ordeal she just shrugged and laughed,' he says. 'To her, it wasn't a big deal, and that helped me view it differently.'

He self-published a fictional account of his ordeal, *Six Magic Numbers*, in December 2009. He has since published a second novel, *Five Still Missing*. He is now working on a third and writing a screenplay. 'There's not much money in writing,' he admits. 'But my Lottery ordeal gave me the drive to follow my dream.' 'Today I have a potential new career as a writer and an amazing girlfriend,' he says. 'Instead of wondering what could have been, I have decided to be grateful for what I've got.'

www.martyntott.com

QC, offered her legal opinion at a reduced rate. But she, too, decided the Totts' claim would not stand up in court. It seemed that while public sentiment was on the Totts' side, the law was not. 'I was determined not to give up,' says Martyn. But that December, he and Kay, then 25, separated. 'We couldn't cope with the pressure,' he says. 'Kay wanted to move on, but I couldn't. I became engrossed in the fight for our money.'

She thought I wasn't paying her enough attention. I thought she was ignoring our opportunity to right the wrong. 'We'd only known each other for two years and the Lottery ordeal quickly highlighted our differences. All we did was bicker. Sadly, both of us agreed we should split and Kay moved out.' So strong was his sense of injustice that Martyn quit his job to write an autobiographical account of his ordeal while he lived off his dimin-

ishing savings. But his motivation floundered and instead he spent his days desperately researching similar Lottery stories on the internet. Frustrated and depressed, he sought solace in Christianity. 'I'd never believed in God before, but I was desperate to make sense of the world again,' he says. His faith sparked an online friendship with an American woman called Tanya in 2003, and led to an unlikely occurrence that Martyn is the first to admit would never have happened

had he not been feeling so vulnerable. Tanya invited him to stay with her in Nashville, Tennessee, where he was introduced to a church group whose leader was a self-appointed 'Apostle'. Today, so fearful is Martyn of reprisals that he refuses to give the man's full name — referring to him only as 'Toby'. 'When I told the Apostle about my Lottery ordeal, he said my destiny was not to become a millionaire, but to spread the Christian ideals of his

And the Nobel prize for daftest research goes to ...

THE NOBEL Prize has been won by Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela, Winston Churchill and Marie Curie. But what of those whose scientific, literary or humanitarian endeavours were flawed, ill-conceived or just plain bonkers? For those inquiring minds there is the Ig Nobel Prize (Ignoble, geddit?) awarded each October to ten unusual pieces of academic research. This month, prizes went to a study entitled 'No Evidence of Contagious Yawning in the Red-Footed Tortoise'

and the discovery that the male Western Australian buprestid beetle mistakes brown beer bottles for female beetles and energetically tries to mate with them. The Chemistry prize went to a team from Shiga University in Japan who developed a fire alarm powered by wasabi. They join esteemed former winners such as a study into how to extract vanilla flavouring from cow dung (2006) a treatise on why woodpeckers don't get headaches (2006) and a

discourse on whether dog fleas can jump higher than cat fleas (2008) And in 2004 the award went to a study on how suicide rates rise in direct proportion to the amount of country music played on the radio. But with research grants being cut, the future of the Ig Nobel-worthy study could be in jeopardy. And then who will answer the pressing scientific questions of the day, such as: 'Why are mosquitoes attracted to limburger cheese?' (2006).